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Adams, John

James Otis, Samuel Adams

and John Hancock . . .



Old South Lectures.

No. 179.

James Otis, Samuel Adams, and John Hancock.

JOHN ADAMS'S TRIBUTES TO THESE AS THE THREE PRINCIPAL
MOVERS AND AGENTS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION.

TO WILLIAM TUDOR.

QUINCY, 29 March, 1817.

Is your daughter, Mrs. Stuart, who I am credibly informed is one of the most accomplished of ladies, a painter? Are you acquainted with Miss Lydia Smith, who, I am also credibly informed, is one of the most accomplished ladies, and a painter? Do you know Mr. Sargent? Do you correspond with your old companion in arms, Colonel John Trumbull? Do you think Fisher will be an historical painter?

Whenever you shall find a painter, male or female, I pray you to suggest a scene and a subject for the pencil.

The scene is the Council Chamber in the old Town House in Boston. The date is in the month of February, 1761, nine years before you entered my office in Cole Lane. As this was five years before you entered college, you must have been in the second form of master Lovell's school.

That council chamber was as respectable an apartment as the House of Commons or the House of Lords in Great Britain, in proportion, or that in the State House in Philadelphia, in which the declaration of independence was signed, in 1776. In this chamber, round a great fire, were seated five Judges, with Lieutenant-Governor Hutchinson at their head, as Chief Justice, all arrayed in their new, fresh, rich robes of scarlet English

broadcloth; in their large cambric bands, and immense judicial wigs. In this chamber were seated at a long table all the barristers at law of Boston, and of the neighboring county of Middlesex, in gowns, bands, and tie wigs. They were not seated on ivory chairs, but their dress was more solemn and more pompous than that of the Roman Senate, when the Gauls broke in upon them.

In a corner of the room must be placed as a spectator and an auditor, wit, sense, imagination, genius, pathos, reason, prudence, eloquence, learning, and immense reading, hanging by the shoulders on two crutches, covered with a great cloth coat, in the person of Mr. Pratt, who had been solicited on both sides, but would engage on neither, being, as Chief Justice of New York, about to leave Boston forever. Two portraits, at more than full length, of King Charles the Second and of King James the Second, in splendid golden frames, were hung up on the most conspicuous sides of the apartment. If my young eyes or old memory have not deceived me, these were as fine pictures as I ever saw; the colors of the royal ermines and long flowing robes were the most glowing, the figures the most noble and graceful, the features the most distinct and characteristic, far superior to those of the King and Queen of France in the Senate chamber of Congress—these were worthy of the pencils of Rubens and Vandyke. There was no painter in England capable of them at that time. They had been sent over without frames in Governor Pownall's time, but he was no admirer of Charles or James. The pictures were stowed away in a garret, among rubbish, till Governor Bernard came, who had them cleaned, superbly framed, and placed in council for the admiration and imitation of all men—no doubt with the advice and concurrence of Hutchinson and all his nebula of stars and satellites.

One circumstance more. Samuel Quincy and John Adams had been admitted barristers at that term. John was the youngest. He should be painted looking like a short thick archbishop of Canterbury, seated at the table with a pen in his hand, lost in admiration, now and then minuting those poor notes which your pupil, Judge Minot, has printed in his history,* with some interpolations. I will copy them from the book, and then point out those interpolations.†

* Vol. ii. pp. 89-90.

† The extract is omitted. The speech is printed, with the omission of the interpolations, in vol. ii. of the works of John Adams, Appendix, p. 523. It was not in the letter as first published

You have now the stage and the scenery. Next follows a narration of the subject. I rather think that we lawyers ought to call it a brief of the cause.

When the British ministry received from General Amherst his despatches, announcing the conquest of Montreal, and the consequent annihilation of the French government in America, in 1759, they immediately conceived the design, and took the resolution, of conquering the English colonies, and subjecting them to the unlimited authority of Parliament. With this view and intention they sent orders and instructions to the collector of the customs in Boston, Mr. Charles Paxton, to apply to the civil authority for writs of assistance, to enable the custom-house officers, tide-waiters, land-waiters, and all, to command all sheriffs and constables, &c., to attend and aid them in breaking open houses, stores, shops, cellars, ships, bales, trunks, chests, casks, packages of all sorts, to search for goods, wares, and merchandise, which had been imported against the prohibitions or without paying the taxes imposed by certain acts of Parliament, called the acts of trade; that is, by certain parliamentary statutes, which had been procured to be passed from time to time for a century before, by a combination of selfish intrigues between West India planters and North American royal governors. These acts never had been executed as revenue laws, and there never had been a time, when they would have been or could have been obeyed as such.

Mr. Paxton, no doubt consulting with Governor Bernard, Lieutenant-Governor Hutchinson, and all the principal crown officers, thought it not prudent to commence his operations in Boston. For obvious reasons, he instructed his deputy collector in Salem, Mr. Cockle; to apply by petition to the Superior Court, in November, 1760, then sitting in that town, for writs of assistance. Stephen Sewall was then Chief Justice of that Court, an able man, an uncorrupted American, and a sincere friend of liberty, civil and religious. He expressed great doubts of the legality of such a writ, and of the authority of the Court to grant it. Not one of his brother judges uttered a word in favor of it; but as it was an application on the part of the crown, it must be heard and determined. After consultation, the Court ordered the question to be argued at the next February term in Boston, namely in 1761.

In the mean time Chief Justice Sewall died, and Lieutenant-Governor Hutchinson was appointed Chief Justice of that Court

in his stead. Every observing and thinking man knew that this appointment was made for the direct purpose of deciding this question in favor of the crown, and all others in which it should be interested. An alarm was spread far and wide. Merchants of Salem and Boston applied to Mr. Pratt, who refused, and to Mr. Otis and Mr. Thacher, who accepted, to defend them against the terrible menacing monster, the writ of assistance. Great fees were offered, but Otis, and, I believe, Thacher, would accept of none. "In such a cause," said Otis, "I despise all fees."

I have given you a sketch of the stage, and the scenery, and the brief of the cause, or, if you like the phrase better, the tragedy, comedy, or farce.

Now for the actors and performers. Mr. Gridley argued with his characteristic learning, ingenuity, and dignity, and said everything that could be said in favor of Cockle's petition; all depending, however, on the "if the Parliament of Great Britain is the sovereign legislature of all the British empire." Mr. Thacher followed him on the other side, and argued with the softness of manners, the ingenuity and cool reasoning, which were remarkable in his amiable character.

But Otis was a flame of fire!—with a promptitude of classical allusions, a depth of research, a rapid summary of historical events and dates, a profusion of legal authorities, a prophetic glance of his eye into futurity, and a torrent of impetuous eloquence, he hurried away every thing before him. American independence was then and there born; the seeds of patriots and heroes were then and there sown, to defend the vigorous youth, the *non sine Diis animosus infans*. Every man of a crowded audience appeared to me to go away, as I did, ready to take arms against writs of assistance. Then and there was the first scene of the first act of opposition to the arbitrary claims of Great Britain. Then and there the child Independence was born. In fifteen years, namely in 1776, he grew up to manhood, and declared himself free.

The Court adjourned for consideration, and after some days, at the close of the term, Hutchinson, the Chief Justice, arose and said, "The Court has considered the subject of writs of assistance, and can see no foundation for such a writ; but, as the practice in England is not known, it has been thought best to continue the question until next term, that in the mean time opportunity may be given to write to England for information concerning the subject." In six months the next term arrived,

but no judgment was pronounced, no letters from England were produced, and nothing more was ever said in Court concerning writs of assistance; but it was generally reported and understood that the Court clandestinely granted them, and the custom-house officers had them in their pockets, though I never knew that they dared to produce them or execute them in any one instance.

Mr. Otis's popularity was without bounds. In May, 1761, he was elected into the House of Representatives by an almost unanimous vote. On the week of his election, I happened to be at Worcester, attending the Court of Common Pleas, of which Brigadier Ruggles was Chief Justice, when the news arrived from Boston of Mr. Otis's election. You can have no idea of the consternation among the government people. Chief Justice Ruggles, at dinner at Colonel Chandler's on that day, said, "Out of this election will arise a d—d faction, which will shake this province to its foundation." Ruggles's foresight reached not beyond his nose. That election has shaken two continents, and will shake all four. For ten years Mr. Otis, at the head of his country's cause, conducted the town of Boston, and the people of the province, with a prudence and fortitude, at every sacrifice of personal interest, and amidst unceasing persecution, which would have done honor to the most virtuous patriot or martyr of antiquity.

The minutes of Mr. Otis's argument are no better a representation of it than the gleam of a glow-worm to the meridian blaze of the sun. I fear I shall make you repent bringing out the old gentleman. *Ridendo dicere verum quid vetat?*

TO WILLIAM TUDOR.

QUINCY, 15 April, 1817.

I have received your obliging favor of the 8th, but cannot consent to your resolution to ask no more questions. Your questions revive my sluggish memory. Since our national legislature have established a national painter,—a wise measure, for which I thank them,—my imagination runs upon the art, and has already painted, I know not how many, historical pictures. I have sent you one; give me leave to send another. The bloody

rencontre between the citizens and the soldiers, on the 5th of March, 1770, produced a tremendous sensation throughout the town and country. The people assembled first at Faneuil Hall, and adjourned to the Old South Church, to the number, as was conjectured, of ten or twelve thousand men, among whom were the most virtuous, substantial, independent, disinterested, and intelligent citizens. They formed themselves into a regular deliberative body, chose their moderator and secretary, entered into discussions, deliberations, and debates, adopted resolutions, appointed committees. What has become of these records, Mr. Tudor? Where are they? Their resolutions in public were conformable to those of every man in private, who dared to express his thoughts or his feelings, "that the regular soldiers should be banished from the town at all hazards." Jonathan Williams, a very pious, inoffensive, and conscientious gentleman, was their Moderator. A remonstrance to the Governor, or the Governor and Council, was ordained, and a demand that the regular troops should be removed from the town. A committee was appointed to present this remonstrance, of which Samuel Adams was the chairman.

Now for the picture. The theatre and the scenery are the same with those at the discussion of writs of assistance. The same glorious portraits of King Charles II. and King James II., to which might be added, and should be added, little miserable likenesses of Governor Winthrop, Governor Bradstreet, Governor Endicott, and Governor Belcher, hung up in obscure corners of the room. Lieutenant-Governor Hutchinson, commander-in-chief in the absence of the Governor, must be placed at the head of the council table. Lieutenant-Colonel Dalrymple, commander-in-chief of his Majesty's military forces, taking rank of all his Majesty's counsellors, must be seated by the side of the Lieutenant-Governor and commander-in-chief of the province. Eight-and-twenty counsellors must be painted, all seated at the council board. Let me see—what costume? What was the fashion of that day, in the month of March? Large white wigs, English scarlet cloth cloaks, some of them with gold-laced hats, not on their heads, indeed, in so august a presence, but on the table before them, or under the table beneath them. Before these illustrious personages appeared SAMUEL ADAMS, a member of the House of Representatives and their clerk, now at the head of the committee of the great assembly at the Old South Church. Thucydides, Livy, or Sallust would make a speech

for him, or, perhaps, the Italian Botta, if he had known any thing of this transaction,—one of the most important of the revolution,—but I am wholly incapable of it; and, if I had vanity enough to think myself capable of it, should not dare to attempt it. He represented the state of the town and the country; the dangerous, ruinous, and fatal effects of standing armies in populous cities in time of peace, and the determined resolution of the public, that the regular troops, at all events, should be removed from the town. Lieutenant-Governor Hutchinson, then commander-in-chief, at the head of a trembling council, said, “he had no authority over the king’s troops; that they had their separate commander and separate orders and instructions, and that he could not interfere with them.” Mr. Adams instantly appealed to the charter of the province, by which the Governor, and in his absence the Lieutenant-Governor, was constituted commander-in-chief of all the military and naval power within its jurisdiction. So obviously true and so irrefragable was the reply, that it is astonishing that Mr. Hutchinson should have so grossly betrayed the Constitution, and so atrociously have violated the duties of his office by asserting the contrary. But either the fears or the ambition of this gentleman, upon this and many other occasions, especially in his controversy with the two houses, three years afterwards, on the supremacy of Parliament, appear to have totally disarranged his understanding. He certainly asserted in public, in the most solemn manner, a multitude of the roundest falsehoods, which he must have known to be such, and which he must have known could be easily and would certainly be detected, if he had not wholly lost his memory, even of his own public writings. You, Mr. Tudor, knew Mr. Adams from your childhood to his death. In his common appearance he was a plain, simple, decent citizen, of middling stature, dress, and manners. He had an exquisite ear for music, and a charming voice, when he pleased to exert it. Yet his ordinary speeches in town meetings, in the House of Representatives, and in Congress exhibited nothing extraordinary; but, upon great occasions, when his deeper feelings were excited, he erected himself, or rather nature seemed to erect him, without the smallest symptom of affectation, into an upright dignity of figure and gesture, and gave a harmony to his voice which made a strong impression on spectators and auditors,—the more lasting for the purity, correctness, and nervous elegance of his style.

This was a delicate and a dangerous crisis. The question in the last resort was, whether the town of Boston should become a scene of carnage and desolation, or not? Humanity to the soldiers conspired with a regard for the safety of the town, in suggesting the wise measure of calling the town together to deliberate. For nothing short of the most solemn promises to the people that the soldiers should, at all hazards, be driven from the town, had preserved its peace. Not only the immense assemblies of the people from day to day, but military arrangements from night to night, were necessary to keep the people and the soldiers from getting together by the ears. The life of a red coat would not have been safe in any street or corner of the town. Nor would the lives of the inhabitants have been much more secure. The whole militia of the city was in requisition, and military watches and guards were everywhere placed. We were all upon a level; no man was exempted; our military officers were our only superiors. I had the honor to be summoned, in my turn, and attended at the State House with my musket and bayonet, my broadsword and cartridge-box, under the command of the famous Paddock. I know you will laugh at my military figure; but I believe there was not a more obedient soldier in the regiment, nor one more impartial between the people and the regulars. In this character I was upon duty all night in my turn. No man appeared more anxious or more deeply impressed with a sense of danger on all sides than our commander, Paddock. He called me, common soldier as I was, frequently to his councils. I had a great deal of conversation with him, and no man appeared more apprehensive of a fatal calamity to the town or more zealous by every prudent measure to prevent it.

Such was the situation of affairs, when Samuel Adams was reasoning with Lieutenant-Governor Hutchinson and Lieutenant-Colonel Dalrymple. He had fairly driven them from all their outworks, breastworks, and entrenchments, to their citadel. There they paused and considered and deliberated. The heads of Hutchinson and Dalrymple were laid together in whispers for a long time; when the whispering ceased, a long and solemn pause ensued, extremely painful to an impatient, expecting audience. Hutchinson, in time, broke silence. He had consulted with Colonel Dalrymple, and the Colonel had authorized him to say, that he might order one regiment down to the castle, if that would satisfy the people. With a self-recollection, a

self-possession, a self-command, a presence of mind that was admired by every man present, Samuel Adams arose with an air of dignity and majesty, of which he was sometimes capable, stretched forth his arm, though even then quivering with palsy, and with an harmonious voice and decisive tone said, "If the Lieutenant-Governor or Colonel Dalrymple, or both together, have authority to remove one regiment, they have authority to remove two, and nothing short of the total evacuation of the town by all the regular troops will satisfy the public mind or preserve the peace of the province."

These few words thrilled through the veins of every man in the audience, and produced the great result. After a little awkward hesitation, it was agreed that the town should be evacuated, and both regiments sent to the castle.

After all this gravity, it is merry enough to relate that William Molineux was obliged to march side by side with the commander of some of these troops, to protect them from the indignation of the people, in their progress to the wharf of embarkation for the castle. Nor is it less amusing that Lord North, as I was repeatedly and credibly informed in England, with his characteristic mixture of good humor and sarcasm, ever after called these troops by the title of "Sam Adams's two regiments."

The painter should seize upon the critical moment, when Samuel Adams stretched out his arm, and made his last speech.

It will be as difficult to do justice as to paint an Apollo; and the transaction deserves to be painted as much as the surrender of Burgoyne. Whether any artist will ever attempt it, I know not.

TO WILLIAM TUDOR.

QUINCY, June 1, 1817.

That Mr. Hutchinson repented as sincerely as Mr. Hamilton did, I doubt not. I hope the repentance of both has been accepted, and their faults pardoned. And I hope I have repented, do repent, and shall ever repent of mine, and meet them both in another world, where there will need no repentance. Such vicissitudes of fortune command compassion; I pity even Napoleon.

You "never profoundly admired Mr. Hancock. He had

vanity and caprice." I can say, with truth, that I profoundly admired him, and more profoundly loved him. If he had vanity and caprice, so had I. And if his vanity and caprice made me sometimes sputter, as you know they often did, mine, I well know, had often a similar effect upon him. But these little flickerings of little passions determine nothing concerning essential characters. I knew Mr. Hancock from his cradle to his grave. He was radically generous and benevolent. He was born in this town, half way between this house and our congregational temple, son of a clergyman of this parish, and grandson of a clergyman of Lexington, both of excellent characters. We were at the same school together, as soon as we were out of petticoats. His father died when he was very young. His uncle, the most opulent merchant in Boston, who had no children, adopted him, placed him in Mr. Lovell's school, educated him at Harvard college, and then took him into his store. And what a school was this! Four large ships constantly plying between Boston and London, and other business in proportion. This was in 1755. He became an example to all the young men of the town. Wholly devoted to business, he was as regular and punctual at his store as the sun in his course. His uncle sent him to London, from whence, after a residence of about a year, he returned to his store, with the same habits of business, unaltered in manners or deportment, and pursued his employments with the same punctuality and assiduity, till the death of his uncle, who left him his business, his credit, his capital, and his fortune; who did more—he left him the protector of his widow. This lady, though her husband left her a handsome independence, would have sunk into oblivion, like so many other most excellent widows, had not the public attention been fastened upon her by the fame of her nephew. Never was a nephew to an aunt more affectionate, dutiful, or respectful. No alteration appeared in Mr. Hancock, either from his travels in England, or from his accession to the fortune of his uncle. The same steady, regular, punctual, industrious, indefatigable man of business; and, to complete his character with the ladies, always genteelly dressed, according to the fashions of those days.

What shall I say of his fortune, his ships? His commerce was a great one. Your honored father told me, at that time, that not less than a thousand families were, every day in the year, dependent on Mr. Hancock for their daily bread. Consider his real estate in Boston, in the country, in Connecticut,

and the rest of New England. Had Mr. Hancock fallen asleep to this day, he would now awake one of the richest men. Had he persevered in business as a private merchant, he might have erected a house of Medicis. Providence, however, did not intend or permit, in this instance, such a calamity to mankind. Mr. Hancock was the delight of the eyes of the whole town. There can be no doubt that he might have had his choice, and he had his choice of a companion; and that choice was very natural, a granddaughter of the great patron and most revered friend of his father. Beauty, politeness, and every domestic virtue justified his predilection.

At the time of this prosperity, I was one day walking in the mall, and, accidentally, met Samuel Adams. In taking a few turns together, we came in full view of Mr. Hancock's house. Mr. Adams, pointing to the stone building, said, "This town has done a wise thing to-day." "What?" "They have made that young man's fortune their own." His prophecy was literally fulfilled; for no man's property was ever more entirely devoted to the public. The town had, that day, chosen Mr. Hancock into the legislature of the province. The quivering anxiety of the public, under the fearful looking for of the vengeance of king, ministry, and parliament, compelled him to a constant attendance in the House; his mind was soon engrossed by public cares, alarms, and terrors; his business was left to subalterns; his private affairs neglected, and continued to be so to the end of his life. If his fortune had not been very large, he must have died as poor as Mr. S. Adams or Mr. Gerry.

I am not writing the life of Mr. Hancock; his biography would fill as many volumes as Marshall's Washington, and be quite as instructive and entertaining. Though I never injured or justly offended him, and though I spent much of my time, and suffered unknown anxiety, in defending his property, reputation, and liberty from persecution, I cannot but reflect upon myself for not paying him more respect than I did in his lifetime. His life will, however, not ever be written. But if statues, obelisks, pyramids, or divine honors were ever merited by men, of cities or nations, James Otis, Samuel Adams, and John Hancock, deserved these from the town of Boston and the United States. Such adulations, however, are monopolized by profligate libelers, by cringing flatterers, by unprincipled ambition, by sordid avarice, by griping usurers, by scheming speculators, by plun-

dering bankers, by blind enthusiasts, by superstitious bigots, by puppies and butterflies, and by everything but honor and virtue. Hence the universal slavery of the human species. Hence a commentary on the well known and most expressive figure of rhetoric, "It grieved the Almighty, at his heart, that he had made man." Nevertheless, this is a good world, and I thank the Almighty that he has made man.

Mr. Hancock had a delicate constitution. He was very infirm. A great part of his life was passed in acute pain. He inherited from his father, though one of the most amiable and beloved of men, a certain sensibility, a keenness of feeling, or, in more familiar language, a peevishness of temper, that sometimes disgusted and afflicted his friends. Yet it was astonishing with what patience, perseverance, and punctuality he attended to business to the last. Nor were his talents or attainments inconsiderable. They were far superior to many who have been much more celebrated. He had a great deal of political sagacity and penetration into men. He was by no means a contemptible scholar or orator. Compared with Washington, Lincoln, or Knox, he was learned. So much, for the present, of Mr. Hancock.

When, in the beginning of this letter, I agreed with you in your opinion of Mr. Hutchinson's repentance, I should have added, he had great reason for repentance. Fled, in his old age, from the detestation of a country, where he had been beloved, esteemed, and admired, and applauded with exaggeration—in short, where he had been everything, from his infancy—to a country where he was nothing; pinched by a pension, which, though ample in Boston, would barely keep a house in London; throwing round his baleful eyes on the exiled companions of his folly; hearing daily of the slaughter of his countrymen and conflagration of their cities; abhorred by the greatest men and soundest part of the nation, and neglected, if not despised, by the rest, hardened as had been my heart against him, I assure you I was melted at the accounts I heard of his condition. Lord Townsend told me that he put an end to his own life. Though I did not believe this, I know he was ridiculed by the courtiers. They laughed at his manners at the levee, at his perpetual quotations of his brother Foster, searching his pockets for letters to read to the king, and the king turning away from him with his head up, &c.

A few words concerning S. Adams in my next.

TO WILLIAM TUDOR.

QUINCY, 5 June, 1817.

You "never profoundly admired Mr. Hancock." I have suggested some hints in his favor. You "never profoundly admired Mr. Samuel Adams." I have promised you an apology for him. You may think it a weak one, for I have no talent at panegyric or apology. "There are all sorts of men in the world." This observation, you may say, is self-evident and futile; yet Mr. Locke thought it not unworthy of him to make it, and, if we reflect upon it, there is more meaning in it than meets the eye at the first blush.

You say, Mr. S. Adams "had too much sternness and pious bigotry." A man in his situation and circumstances must possess a large fund of sternness of stuff, or he will soon be annihilated. His piety ought not to be objected to him, or any other man. His bigotry, if he had any, was a fault; but he certainly had not more than Governor Hutchinson and Secretary Oliver, who, I know from personal conversation, were as stanch Trinitarians and Calvinists as he was, and treated all Arians and Arminians with more contempt and scorn than he ever did. Mr. Adams lived and conversed freely with all sectarians, in philosophy and divinity. He never imposed his creed on any one, or endeavored to make proselytes to his religious opinions. He was as far from sentencing any man to perdition, who differed from him, as Mr. Holley, Dr. Kirkland, or Dr. Freeman. If he was a Calvinist, a Calvinist he had been educated, and so had been all his ancestors for two hundred years. He had been, from his childhood, too much devoted to politics to be a profound student in metaphysics and theology, or to make extensive researches or deep investigations into such subjects. Nor had any other man attempted it, in this nation, in that age, if any one has attempted it since. Mr. Adams was an original—*sui generis*, *sui juris*. The variety of human characters is infinite. Nature seems to delight in showing the inexhaustibility of her resources. There never were two men alike, from the first man to the last, any more than two pebbles or two peas.

Mr. Adams was born and tempered a wedge of steel to split the knot of *lignum vitæ*, which tied North America to Great Britain. Blunderheaded as were the British ministry, they had sagacity enough to discriminate from all others, for inexorable

vengeance, the two men most to be dreaded by them, Samuel Adams and John Hancock; and had not James Otis been then dead, or worse than dead, his name would have been at the head of the TRIUMVIRATE.

James Otis, Samuel Adams, and John Hancock were the three most essential characters; and Great Britain knew it, though America does not. Great and important and excellent characters, aroused and excited by these, arose in Pennsylvania, Virginia, New York, South Carolina, and in all the other States, but these three were the first movers, the most constant, steady, persevering springs, agents, and most disinterested sufferers and firmest pillars of the whole Revolution. I shall not attempt even to draw the outlines of the biography of Mr. Samuel Adams. Who can attempt it?

*“Quæ ante conditam condendamve urbem, poëticis magis decora fabulis, quam incorruptis rerum gestarum monumentis traduntur, ea”** *nec possum rejellere. Quia non tempus, nec oculos, nec manus habeo.* But, if I had time, eyes, and fingers at my command, where should I find documents and memorials? Without the character of Samuel Adams, the true history of the American Revolution can never be written. For fifty years, his pen, his tongue, his activity, were constantly exerted for his country without fee or reward. During that time, he was an almost incessant writer. But where are his writings? Who can collect them? And, if collected, who will ever read them? The letters he wrote and received, where are they? I have seen him at Mrs. Yard’s in Philadelphia, when he was about to leave Congress, cut up with his scissors whole bundles of letters into atoms that could never be reunited, and throw them out of the window, to be scattered by the winds. This was in summer, when he had no fire. In winter he threw whole handfuls into the fire. As we were on terms of perfect intimacy, I have joked him, perhaps rudely, upon his anxious caution. His answer was, “Whatever becomes of me, my friends shall never suffer by my negligence.” This may be thought a less significant anecdote than another. Mr. Adams left the letters he had received and preserved in possession of his widow. This lady, as was natural, lent them to a confidential friend of her husband, Mr.

* Livy finishes the sentence thus, *nec affirmare nec rejellere, in animo est.* The addition in the text is by the writer.

Avery, who then was, and had been secretary of the commonwealth under the administration of Mr. Adams and Mr. Hancock. Mr. Avery informed me, that he "had them, and that they were a complete history of the Revolution." I will not say into whose hands they fell, after Mr. Avery's death, and I cannot say where they are now; but I have heard that a gentleman in Charlestown, Mr. Austin, undertook to write the life of Mr. Adams; but, finding his papers had been so garbled that the truth could not be discovered, he abandoned his design. Never will those letters, which Secretary Avery possessed, be brought together again; nor will they ever be found. So much for Mr. Adams, at present. Now for Mr. Otis.

I write no biographies or biographical sketches; I give only hints. James Otis was descended from our most ancient families. His education was the best his country afforded. He was bred to the bar under Mr. Gridley, the greatest lawyer and the greatest classic scholar I ever knew at any bar. His application was incessant and indefatigable. Justice Richard Dana has often told me, that the apartment in which Otis studied, when a pupil and a clerk of Mr. Gridley, was near his house; that he had watched him from day to day, and that he had never known a student in law so punctual, so steady, so constant and persevering. Accordingly, as soon as he was admitted to the bar, he became a conspicuous figure. And among whom? Gridley, Pratt, Trowbridge; and he was much admired, and as much celebrated as any of them. His generous, manly, noble character, as a private gentleman, his uncommon attainments in literature, especially in the law, and his nervous, commanding eloquence at the bar, were everywhere spoken of. The government soon discerned his superiority, and commissioned him Advocate-General. He married a lady, who, in that day, was esteemed a fortune. From 1755 to 1758, I heard my master, Colonel James Putnam, of Worcester, who was a critical judge, and Mr. Trowbridge, the then Attorney-General, and his lady, constantly speaking of Otis as the greatest, the most learned, the most manly, and most honest young man of his age. All this was before I had ever seen Mr. Otis. I never saw him till late in the autumn of 1758, nor Mr. Samuel Adams till after that year.

To sum up in a few words, the two young men, whom I have known to enter the stage of life with the most luminous, unclouded prospects, and the best founded hopes, were James Otis and John Hancock. They were both essential to the Rev-

olution, and both fell sacrifices to it. Mr. Otis, from 1760 to 1770, had correspondences in this province, in New England, in the middle and southern colonies, in England, and in Scotland. What has become of these letters and answers?

Mr. Otis, soon after my earliest acquaintance with him, lent me a summary of Greek Prosody of his own collection and composition, a work of profound learning and great labor. I had it six months in my possession, before I returned it. Since my return from Europe, I asked his daughter whether she had found that work among her father's manuscripts. She answered me with a countenance of woe that you may more easily imagine than I can describe, that she "had not a line from her father's pen; that he had spent much time, and taken great pains, to collect together all his letters and other papers, and, in one of his unhappy moments, committed them all to the flames." I have used her own expressions.

Such has been the fate of the memorials of Mr. James Otis and Mr. Samuel Adams. It was not without reason, then, that I wrote to Mr. Niles, of Baltimore, that the true history of the American Revolution is lost forever. I could write volumes of other proofs of the same truth, before, during, and since the Revolution. But *cui bono*? They would be read by very few, and by very few of those few would be credited, and, by this minimum of a few, would be imputed to the vanity, egotism, ill humor, envy, jealousy, and disappointed ambition of your sincere friend, John Adams; for the character of this nation is strangely altered.

TO WILLIAM WIRT.

QUINCY, 5 January, 1818.

Your sketches of the life of Mr. Henry have given me a rich entertainment. I will not compare them to the Sybil conducting Æneas to see the ghosts of departed sages and heroes in the region below, but to an angel conveying me to the abodes of the blessed on high, to converse with the spirits of just men made perfect. The names of Henry, Lee, Bland, Pendleton, Washington, Rutledge, Dickinson, Wythe, and many others, will ever thrill through my veins with an agreeable sensation. I am not about to make any critical remarks upon your work, at present. But, Sir,

Erant heroes ante Agamemnona multi.

Or, not to garble Horace,

Vixere fortes ante Agamemnona
Multi; sed omnes illacrimabiles
Urguentur, ignotique longâ
Nocte, carent quia vate sacro.

If I could go back to the age of thirty-five, Mr. Wirt, I would endeavor to become your rival; not in elegance of composition, but in a simple narration of facts, supported by records, histories, and testimonies, of irrefragable authority. I would adopt, in all its modesty, your title, "Sketches of the Life and Writings of James Otis, of Boston," and, in imitation of your example, I would introduce portraits of a long catalogue of illustrious men, who were agents in the Revolution, in favor of it or against it.

Jeremiah Gridley, the father of the Bar in Boston, and the preceptor of Pratt, Otis, Thacher, Cushing, and many others; Benjamin Pratt, Chief Justice of New York; Colonel John Tyng, James Otis, of Boston, the hero of the biography; Oxenbridge Thacher, Jonathan Sewall, Attorney-General and Judge of Admiralty; Samuel Quincy, Solicitor-General; Daniel Leonard, now Chief Justice of Bermuda; Josiah Quincy, the Boston Cicero; Richard Dana, and Francis Dana, his son, first minister to Russia, and afterwards Chief Justice; Jonathan Mayhew, D.D., Samuel Cooper, D.D., Charles Chauncy, D.D., James Warren and his wife; Joseph Warren, of Bunker's Hill; John Winthrop, Professor at Harvard College, and a member of Council; Samuel Dexter, the father; John Worthington, of Springfield; Joseph Hawley, of Northampton, and James Lovell, of Boston; Governors Shirley, Pownall, Bernard, Hutchinson, Hancock, Bowdoin, Adams, Sullivan, and Gerry; Lieutenant-Governor Oliver, Chief Justice Oliver, Judge Edmund Trowbridge, Judge William Cushing, and Timothy Ruggles, ought not to be omitted. The military characters, Ward, Lincoln, Warren, Knox, Brooks, Heath, &c., must come in, of course. Nor should Benjamin Kent, Samuel Swift, or John Read, be forgotten.

I envy none of the well-merited glories of Virginia, or any of her sages or heroes. But, Sir, I am jealous, very jealous, of the honor of Massachusetts.

The resistance to the British system for subjugating the colonies, began in 1760, and in the month of February, 1761, James Otis electrified the town of Boston, the province of Massachu-

setts Bay, and the whole continent, more than Patrick Henry ever did in the whole course of his life. If we must have panegyric and hyperbole, I must say, that if Mr. Henry was Demosthenes and Mr. Richard Henry Lee, Cicero, James Otis was Isaiah and Ezekiel united.

I hope, Sir, that some young gentleman of the ancient and honorable family of the "Searches," will hereafter do impartial justice both to Virginia and Massachusetts.

After all this freedom, I assure you, Sir, it is no flattery, when I congratulate the nation on the acquisition of an Attorney-General of such talents and industry as your "Sketches" demonstrate.

TO WILLIAM WIRT.

QUINCY, 7 March, 1818.

Be pleased to accept my cordial thanks for the present of an elegant copy of your Sketches of Mr. Henry. I know not whether I shall ever have time to make you any other return than thanks; but, as I see you wish to investigate the sources of the American Revolution, if you will give me leave, I will give you such hints as my memory affords, to assist you.

In 1764 was published, in Boston, a pretty little pamphlet, "The Sentiments of a British American," the motto of which ought to have warned Great Britain to desist from her tyrannical system of taxation.

Asellum in prato timidus pascebat senex.
 Is, hostium clamore subito territus,
 Suadebat asino fugere, ne possent capi.
 At ille lentus: quæso, num binas mihi
 Clitellas impositurum victorem putas?
 Senex negavit. Ergo quid refert mea
 Cui serviam? clitellas dum portem meas.

Phædrus.

Considering "An Act for granting certain duties in the British colonies and plantations in America," of the 4 G. III., he says: "The first objection is, that a tax is laid on several commodities, to be raised and levied in the plantations, and to be remitted home to England. This is esteemed as a grievance, inasmuch as they are laid without the consent of the representatives of the colonists. It is esteemed an essential British right, that

no person shall be subject to any tax, but what, in person or by his representative, he has a voice in laying."

I am indebted to you, Sir, for the reperusal of this pretty little thing. I had never seen it for fifty-four years, and should never have seen it again; but your book has excited me, having no copy of it, to borrow it as a great favor for a short time. It was written by Oxenbridge Thacher, a barrister at law in Boston. There is so much resemblance between this pamphlet and Mr. Jay's address to the people of England, written ten years afterwards, that, as Johnson said of his *Rasselas* and Voltaire's *Candide*, one might be suspected to have given birth to the other.

In 1764 was published, in Boston, "The Rights of the British Colonies Asserted and Proved," by James Otis, Esq. This work was read in the House of Representatives of Massachusetts, in manuscript, in 1764, and, though not ordered by them to be published, it was printed with their knowledge. In it these propositions are asserted as fundamental.

"1. That the supreme and subordinate powers of legislation should be free and sacred in the hands where the community have once rightfully placed them.

2. The supreme, national legislative cannot be altered justly till the commonwealth is dissolved, nor a subordinate legislative taken away without forfeiture or other good cause. Nor then can the subjects in the subordinate government be reduced to a state of slavery, and subject to the despotic rule of others.

3. No legislative, supreme or subordinate, has a right to make itself arbitrary.

4. The supreme legislative cannot justly assume a power of ruling by *ex tempore* arbitrary decrees, but is bound to dispense justice by known, settled rules, and by duly authorized, independent judges.

5. THE SUPREME POWER *cannot take from any man any part of his property*, WITHOUT HIS CONSENT IN PERSON, OR BY REPRESENTATION.

6. The legislative cannot transfer the power of making laws to any other hands. . . ."

In an appendix to this work is a copy of instructions, given by the city of Boston at their annual meeting, in May, 1764, to their representatives, Royal Tyler, James Otis, Thomas Cushing, and Oxenbridge Thacher, Esqrs. These instructions were drawn by Samuel Adams, who was one of those appointed by



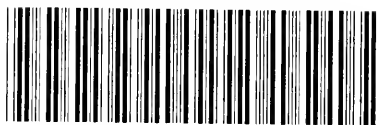
the town for that purpose. These instructions are a sample of that simplicity, purity, and harmony of style, which distinguished all the productions of Mr. Adams's pen. I wish I could transcribe the whole; but the paragraph most directly to the present purpose is the following:—"But what still heightens our apprehensions is, that these unexpected proceedings may be preparatory to new taxations upon us. For, if our trade may be taxed, why not our lands? Why not the produce of our lands, and every thing we possess or make use of? This, we apprehend, annihilates our charter right to govern and tax ourselves. It strikes at our British privileges, which, as we have never forfeited them, we hold in common with our fellow-subjects, who are natives of Britain. If taxes are laid upon us in any shape, without our having a legal representation where they are laid, are we not reduced from the character of free subjects to the miserable state of tributary slaves?" This whole work was published more than a year before Mr. Henry's resolutions were moved.

John Adams, in passages in the foregoing letters, laments that important papers which had been prepared by Samuel Adams and James Otis were destroyed, and that with them "the true history of the American Revolution is lost forever." This word is perhaps too strong, but certain it is that nothing brings us into such close touch with the Revolution as the words of the actors in it. Among all the actors in those stirring scenes, none was a more graphic writer than John Adams himself; and we have in his large correspondence and other papers pictures of the Revolution and the stirring time before it which have a vividness and a historical value not surpassed by any similar writings relating to the period. A few of his letters to William Tudor and William Wirt are given in the present leaflet, as samples of a score of such relating to the men and events in Massachusetts in the decade before 1775, which may be found in vol. x of his collected works. An interesting letter on Hutchinson, the royal governor, is that to William Tudor, Nov. 16, 1816. Many letters relate to Otis and his speech against the writs of assistance, one of the most impressive being that to Dr. J. Morse, Nov. 20, 1815. "A history of military operations from 1775 to 1783," he says here, "is not a history of the American Revolution. The revolution was in the minds and hearts of the people, and in the union of the colonies, both of which were substantially effected before hostilities commenced." Under date of June 1, 1818, he begins a series of letters to William Tudor, giving an analysis of Otis's argument in his famous speech.

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